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ABSTRACT

One of the goals of the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was the involvement of parents and community members in the planning, implementation and evaluation of bilingual programs. A study of Chicago parents, some with children in bilingual programs and others with children in English-only programs, focused upon: (1) the extent and type of parent participation in bilingual program; (2) the extent of parents' knowledge of and training in the philosophy and goals of bilingual education; (3) parents' opinions of bilingual education; and (4) parents' evaluations of current bilingual programs. Findings and data presented indicate that Puerto Rican parents who have children in a bilingual education program have significantly positive attitudes toward and greater knowledge of bilingual education than parents whose children are not enrolled in a bilingual program. Recommendations are made for increasing parent participation and understanding of bilingual education. (EB)

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PUERTO RICAN PARENTS KNOWLEDGE OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARD BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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One of the goals of the Bilingual Education Act, Title VII of E.S.E.A. in 1967 was the involvement of parents and community members in the planning, implementation and evaluation of bilingual programs. It is rationalized that participation will enhance understanding and support for bilingual education, facilitating their children's education.

To be effective participants parents should understand the philosophy, goals, and evaluation methods of bilingual education programs. They should have some idea of what constitutes a quality and viable bilingual program.

There have been few studies on the extent of parental participation and their knowledge of bilingual education programs. Separate studies by the Chicago Board of Education[1] and Tirado and Balasabramonian[2] found that less than a majority of Latino parents are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of bilingual programs. On the other hand, parents viewed the programs positively and felt comfortable in the school setting because they were able to communicate in their native language.

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Both studies concluded the success of bilingual education is dependent upon parental participation in the decision-making process. Additional research is needed on Latino parents participation in and attitudes toward bilingual education programs.

METHOD

Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine understanding of and attitudes toward bilingual education of Puerto Rican parents who have children in a bilingual program and those who do not have children in a bilingual program. The following general areas were examined:

1. The extent and type of parent participation in bilingual programs.
2. The extent of parents knowledge of and training in the philosophy and goals of bilingual education.
3. Parents opinions of bilingual education.
4. Parents evaluation of current bilingual programs.

Procedure

The data collected for the study was obtained from parents whose children attended schools with bilingual programs in one Chicago school district. Fifteen of twenty elementary schools were randomly selected for the study. From each of the fifteen schools, ten Puerto Rican mothers who have children in the second, third and fourth grades were randomly selected. Of

the ten mothers, five had children who participated in the bilingual program and five parents whose children were not in a bilingual program. The total sample included 150 parents, 75 with children in bilingual programs and 75 whose children were not in bilingual programs.

A self-devised 39 item attitude inventory was administered to the parents during regular advisory council meetings, bilingual advisory council meetings, home visitations and sent home with the children. The inventory, written in both English and Spanish, also included an open-ended question.

RESULTS

The findings showed that Puerto Rican parents (Group A) who have children in a bilingual program have significantly positive attitudes toward and greater knowledge of bilingual education than Puerto Rican parents (Group B) whose children are not enrolled in a bilingual program. This was evident in each of the general areas examined.

The first area: "parents participation in bilingual programs" showed that 93 percent of Group A as opposed to 20 percent of Group B attended school meetings that explained bilingual/bicultural programs. Also a higher percentage (95%) of Group A than Group B (47%) visited the school at least once a month. Eighty percent of Group A in contrast to 44 percent of Group B were active members of the Bilingual/Bicultural

Council. On the issue of parent participation in the development and evaluation, 100 percent of Group A as compared to 16 percent of Group B believed parents should have an active role in bilingual programs. More specifically, one-hundred percent of Group A felt parents should be involved in the planning and development of bilingual program, whereas only 24 percent of Group B held the same opinion. A similar significant difference in responses was found on the issue of parents evaluation of bilingual programs, 84 percent of Group A and 17 percent of Group B agreed.

The only question which the two groups agreed upon was whether the schools welcomed advise and assistance from parents. Fifty percent of parents of both groups agreed that schools welcomed parent participation, while approximately 40 percent of both parent groups disagreed.

The data seem to indicate that the parents' participation in and attitudes toward bilingual education is determined by whether or not they have children in a bilingual program. And a school's acceptance of parent involvement has relatively little influence on the participation or desire to participate of parents who have children enrolled in a bilingual program. It may influence those parents with no children in bilingual programs.

Responses to the second area: "Parents training in and knowledge of bilingual education" showed that 75 percent of parents with children in bilingual programs (Group A) as compared

to 20 percent of parents with no children in bilingual programs (Group B) attended bilingual conferences, seminars and workshops where the bilingual philosophy, program goals, techniques and legislation were discussed. As a result 97 percent of Group A as opposed to 19 percent of Group B understood the goals of bilingual education. Eighty-eight to 84 percent of Group A had a good grasp of the history and philosophy and the difference between maintenance and transitional bilingual programs as compared to only 13 percent of Group B.

Parents also had significantly disparate opinions regarding the requirements for bilingual teachers and the type of programs and materials. Eighty-two to 91 percent of Group A parents in contrast to 28 to 39 percent of Group B parents believed that bilingual teachers should be native speakers and bicultural, respectively. Whereas 68 percent of Group A and 33 percent of Group B felt only Latino teachers should teach in predominately Latino schools. One-hundred percent of Group A and only 23 and 33 percent of Group B thought that all subject areas should be taught and all tests should be administered in two languages. On the issue of bilingual materials, 92 to 100 percent of Group A and only 20 to 28 percent of Group B supported the use of bicultural and bilingual teaching materials. Again the degree of parents understanding of and commitment to bilingual education appears to be influenced by their offsprings enrollment in a bilingual program.

Responses to the third area: "parents evaluation of their school's bilingual program" revealed that a significant majority (84%) of parents (Group A) are satisfied with the bilingual program in their school. Ninety-four percent of Group A and only 20 percent of Group B stated that the school program is more effective academically than before the institution of bilingual programs in the school. Eighty percent of Group A rated the bilingual programs "good" to "excellent " (Group B gave no response). However only 51 percent of Group A and only 3 percent of Group B had actually participated in a formal evaluation of a bilingual program in or outside their school. On the other hand, 81 percent of Group A and 55 percent of Group B felt the entire community should be invovled in the evaluation process.

Although the parents stated the bilingual programs were effective, only 29 percent of Group A (Group B did not respond), thought the facilities were adequate; 46 percent felt they were inadequate.

Responses to the fourth areas: "parents opinions and perceptions of bilingual education programs" revealed that 100 percent of Group A parents and 21 to 35 percent of Group B parents believed bilingual education enhanced Latino children's self-concept and their academic achievement. More of Group A (97%) than Group B (40%) felt bilingual education to be beneficial for their children.

Each parent group had different opinions as to whom bilingual programs are designed and the type of program and grade level. A higher percentage of Group A (81%) than Group B (47%) believed non-Spanish-speaking children should be taught Spanish. This supports their response to whether or not bilingual programs were designed for non-English-speaking children only; 37 percent of Group A stated yes, 56 percent no. Whereas 60 percent of Group B replied yes and 13 percent no. On the issue of maintenance and transitional bilingual programs, 80 percent of Group A and 15 percent of Group B favored maintenance programs, while 20 percent of Group A and 85 percent of Group B favored transitional programs.

The responses of the two groups were consistent on the question: "at which grade levels should bilingual education be taught and whether it should be taught at all?" Ninety-six percent of Group A and 40 percent of Group B selected grades 1-12, and only 4 percent of Group A and 60 percent of Group B felt it should not be taught in the schools at all.

The following responses were obtained from the open-ended question:

> "The program has created better communication between parents, teachers and the school.
>
> We (parents) feel more comfortable in the school since my children have been in the bilingual programs.

I am more envolved and interested in the school. I get to meet the principal and teachers since joining the bilingual advisory council.

The school is more a part of the community than before because parents feel free to speak Spanish during the meetings.

My children are happier in school."

The above comments were given by parents with children in a bilingual program. Many of the parents who had no children in bilingual programs stated there was little change in the program or school as far as their children were concerned. Or bilingual programs should be only for those children who spoke little or no English. As one parent stated: "If the children are going to live in America, they should learn only English in school. They can learn Spanish at home if the parents want it."

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that Puerto Rican parents whose children were in bilingual programs had a higher identity with and expectations of the program than parents whose children were not in a bilingual program. The findings of this study agree with the results of Tirado and Balasabramonian[3] and the Chicago Board of Education Steering Committee[4] regarding greater Latino parents participation in school activities,

involving parents are more knowledgeable about bilingual education and are more positive and supportive of bilingual education in general. Another area of agreement was the need for greater parent involvement, particularly in the decision-making process of bilingual development and evaluation. The studies found there was less direct parent involvement than the researchers expected.

The differences in opinion between the two groups of parents is perhaps the result of ideological differences. The parents with children in bilingual programs embrace the pluralistic concept or acculturation process and want to retain their native language and cultural traditions. While the parents with no children in bilingual programs probably favored assimilation into the American mainstream. But there was also a relative level of involvement by parents who had no children in bilingual programs. Forty-four percent were active members of the Bilingual/Bicultural Council and 47 percent visited the school at least once a month. Although they did not agree with or understand goals of bilingual education, they nevertheless participated in school-parent functions.

To increase parent participation and understanding of bilingual education it is recommended: 1) improve the dissemination of information on bilingual education, 2) establish a staff liaison person between the parents and school, 3) establish a Bilingual council independent of the general school council, 4) involve the community and local

agencies in the development of bilingual programs, and 5) give parents and the community greater input into the decision-making process.

It is evident that parents will support those programs that they help plan, implement and evaluate. As Cordasco stated, "It is unlikely that quality education can be brought to any community until its members participate in the decision-making process that shapes their children's education."(5) Latino parents can be excellent resource persons with significant contributions to developing appropriate and relevant bilingual programs for their children.

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